



HUMAN RIGHTS EDUCATION THROUGH SOCIAL STUDIES: A NECESSITY FOR SOCIAL AND CIVIL LEARNING IN NIGERIA

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Abstract:

This is a literature-based paper that looked at the role of Social Studies education in teaching, protecting and advocating for human rights in Nigeria. The paper discussed the meaning of human rights and some of the philosophies and theories of human rights. The paper paid attention to the two human rights theories that influenced the present-day discussions of human rights – the Will theory and the Interest theory. The categories of human rights were also discussed. The writer looked at different Human Rights violations in Nigeria under the following sub-headings; government violations, child labor and child marriage and women abuse. She then discussed the role of Social Studies education in Human Rights Education and concluded by saying that since Human Right education is a program that includes both process dimension and content that since Social Studies primary responsibility is to develop reflective citizens, Social Studies teachers must be adequately prepared to enable them teach the concepts adequately because Human Right is a key component of 21st century civic education.

Keywords: human right education, social studies education, social and civil learning, Nigeria

1. Introduction

Human Rights are rights believed and agreed to belong to every person. They are commonly viewed as fundamental rights to which a person is innately to, simply because he is a human being. They are innate to human beings irrespective of the ethnic origin, religion, color etc. These rights are all complimentary, collective and inseparable.

The philosophy of human rights tries to examine the hidden basis of the concept of human rights and looks at its content and rationale. Different theoretical approaches have been used to explain why and how Human Rights have developed into a part of social anticipations.

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One of the earliest Western philosophies of human rights is that human rights are a product of a natural law, emanating from different philosophical or religious areas. Other theories hold that Human Rights summarize moral behavior which is a human social product established by a process of social and biological transformation.

The two theories that influence present-day Human Rights discussion are the Interest Theory and the Will Theory. Interest Theory is of the opinion that the main function of human rights is to protect and promote certain important human interests, while Will Theory tries to create the efficacy of Human Rights based on the exclusive human capacity for freedom.

Human rights are usually categorized into civic and political rights, economic, social and cultural rights. Civil and Political rights are set down in articles 3 to 21 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). Economic, Social and cultural rights are set down in articles 22 to 28 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. (ICESCR).

The economic, social and cultural rights consist of; the right to work in a comfortable environment, the right to social security, the right to a suitable standard of living and to an acceptable standard of physical and mental well-being, the right to education and the gratification of benefits of cultural freedom and scientific progress.

The civic and political rights encompass; the right to move freely; freedom in expressing ones opinion, equality before the law; the right to be tried fairly and assumption of innocence; freedom of religion; peaceful assembly; freedom of association; freedom in participating in public affairs and elections; and protection of minority rights. It precludes irrational denial of life; torture, humiliating treatment; slavery and forced labour; discretionary arrest or detention; irrational interference with privacy; discrimination; and advancement of racial or religious hatred.

2. Human Right Violations in Nigeria

Human rights in Nigeria are contained in the Nigeria's constitution. Nigeria is among the societies with high human rights violations. Human right violation happens when actions by state or non- state actors exploit or abuse, neglect or deny basic human rights, it also occurs when any state or non-state actor breaches any part of the UDHR treaty or other international human rights or humanitarian law.

Human rights abuses are checked by United Nations committees, National Institutions, government and independent non-governmental organizations such as Amnesty International, International Federation of Human Rights, Human Rights Watch etc., They gather data on alleged human rights abuses and try to enforce human rights laws.

Human rights abuse around the world has invited world condemnation and has drawn attention of the international communities, like the United Nations,

Commonwealth and some NGOs. In Nigeria human right violations are witnessed in some of the following ways;

2.1 Freedom of Expression

There are so many reports on the abuse of freedom of expression of one's opinion by Nigerian citizens. General Babangida took power in 1985 and abolished Decree N0. 4 of 1984, that made it criminal behavior to publish any material that was considered embarrassing or against the interests of the government. When this happened there was renewed hope that freedom of expression by citizens is back, but this hope did not last long as his government started arresting and jailing its critics and punishing employees by sack or demotion of those that did not support or promote their views. His regime is believed to have closed more newspapers and banned more famous organizations than any other regime in Nigeria's post-colonial history. Though the scope of freedom of expression have improved, there is still injustices and exploitations. Some of these violations are discussed below.

2.2 Government Violations

Nigerian security forces are frequently alleged to carry out erratic arrests and torture. There are forced disappearances, assassinations and extrajudicial killings. These human rights abuse commonly occur within the framework of the Nigerian government's security operations or are directed by them.

2.3 Child Labor and Child Marriage

According to the U.S Department of Labour, 30% of Nigerian Children within the age bracket of 5 to 14years old are engaged in forced labour in different sectors. According to them, it is mostly observed in the agricultural sector where they are engaged in the production of cocoa, cassava and sand and in the mining industry where they crush gravel and granite, mine and quarry.

Nigeria is known to have many small farms that mostly depend on family labor in the operations of the farm. In Nigeria, most child labor is seen in the informal agricultural sector. It is said that more than 50% of children living in the rural areas of Nigeria spend more than 20 hours a week working. (United Nations)

Early and Child marriage is common in Nigeria among Muslims in the northern part of the country, they believe that early marriage prevents promiscuity. However, poverty is the major cause of early marriage. Some girls are usually married off before they are 15, the give birth early and start taking care of their children and do not have access to education because of the early age at which they give birth and begin caring for their children.

2.4 Women Abuse

Nigerian women face various forms of human rights violations despite the Provisions of 1999 constitution. Men are still in charge and in control of land and landed properties

from a societal perspective. Even though education have provided many women access to wage labor which puts men away from direct control they are still restrained by societal expectations and boundaries. Even when they have employment opportunities, Nigerian tradition will say whether the career will be secondary to the woman's primary role as a mother or a housewife.

Another area Nigerian woman face injustice is when they become widows. The women are subject to cultural burden that conflict with human rights. In many cultures' women are viewed as mere property that can be inherited like other properties. The lack of enough property right makes women dependent on men whether single, married, or widowed. However, there has been a major drop of such practices in recent years.

However, the U.S. Department of State is of the opinion that the most serious human rights problems in Nigeria are the following; abuses committed by Boko Haram, the militant sect which was responsible for killings, bombings, and other attacks throughout the country resulting in deaths, injuries, and destruction of property; election frauds and irregularities which results in occasional curtailment of citizens' right to change their government; politically motivated and extra judicial killings by security forces; restrictions on freedom of speech, press, assembly, religion, and movement; official corruption; violence and discrimination against women; child abuse; female genital mutilation; the killing of children suspected of witchcraft; child sexual exploitation; ethnic, regional, and religious discrimination; trafficking in persons for the purpose of prostitution and forced labor; discrimination against persons with disabilities; discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity; vigilante killings.

In efforts to eliminate violations of human rights especially in a multi-cultural society like Nigeria, building awareness and protesting inhumane treatment will lead to calls for action and will sometimes lead to improved conditions.

2.5 Human Right Education

Amnesty International defined human rights education as a process of equipping people so that they can exhibit skills and behaviour that would promote dignity and equality in the community, society and the world in general. Human right education can be looked at as a learning process that builds up the required knowledge, values and proficiency of human rights of which the aim is to establish a satisfactory human rights culture. This type of education is supposed to help students integrate the concepts into their decision making and also values.

The insistence for human rights education is growing globally continuously. The Asia-Pacific Center for Education for International Understanding and the United Nations Academic Impact organized a Global Citizenship Education Seminar at the UN headquarters in New York in 2018. This seminar and other seminars and conferences like this help in the formulation of new concepts and ideas connected to human rights education.

Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 26.2 stated that education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of

respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It went further to say that it must promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace. All over the world education is being valued as a means of advancing the growth and development of each individual in order to realize the democratic ideals of freedom and respect for the rights of all. As observed by the National Council for Social Studies United State, Human Rights Education is growing in an increasingly globalized world, this growth and development must emphasize not only the rights and obligations arising from the country's citizenship but also the rights and responsibilities that arise both domestically and globally for our common humanity.

Social Studies is the most appropriate to accomplish this task because it equips the students with the knowledge, values and attitudes, skills and dispositions to be engaged, reflective and responsible citizens and aware members of the world community. The National Council for the Social Studies asserts that that Human Rights Education in both its humanitarian and civil aspects is a necessary element of Social Studies programs and should be integrated throughout the educational experience of all learners from early childhood through advanced education and lifelong learning.

3. Role of Social Studies Education in Human Right Education

One of the major roles of education is, it is a means of fostering the growth and development of individuals in other to realize the democratic ideals of freedom, equality, nondiscrimination and respect for the rights of all. This growth and development must emphasize both the rights and obligations arising from citizenship and the rights and responsibilities that arise domestically and globally from our common humanity.

Social Studies education is best positioned for this task. This is because it equips the students with knowledge, values, skills attitudes and dispositions to be engaged, responsible and reflective members of the world community. The National Council for Social Studies USA (NCSS) is of the opinion that Human Rights Education in its civil and humanitarian aspects is a compulsory element of Social Studies Program. Because of this, it is necessary to integrate it into the educational experience of all learners from early childhood through lifelong learning and advanced learning.

A basic understanding of universal human rights and international humanitarian law is an essential resource for citizens all over the world, in other words it is the basic responsibility of educators in Nigeria to integrate human rights education into their teaching and learning process. According to Human Rights Educators USA, Human Right Education is defined as a lifelong process of teaching and learning that leads the individual into the development of knowledge, skills and values that will help him to exercise and protect the human rights of themselves and others among other things. (www.hreusa.net)

In Social Studies teaching and learning process in Nigeria common principles inform the methods to effectively teach and learn human rights. The methods include: participatory method where you use techniques like role plays, discussion, mock trials, simulations and debates. Using these techniques will encourage students to engage in open minded examinations of human rights concerns and reflects on their environment critically and are able to reach their own conclusions and visualize their choices in presented situations. Students can also make connections between the values thought and their own lived experiences.

Through these Social Studies teaching techniques student will be able to examine both the global and domestic implication of human rights themes they are exposed to and try to understand how they relate to diversity, relationship between individual choices and collective wellbeing and economic inequality. When students form their Social Studies research skills with primary source documents, they will understand that the protection of human rights requires a structure of laws and policies that reviews a developing understanding of justice. Social Studies education is best equipped to deliver this type of education.

4. Conclusion

Human rights education is a program that includes both process dimensions and content, therefore the learning environment should cement respect for fairness and human dignity. If this is done students can easily connect their experiences to core human rights concepts. Human right education is more interesting or appealing when it provides students with opportunities to act on their understanding and beliefs while relating to challenges at local, state, national and global levels. This should be one of the major roles of Social Studies teaching and learning and education in general in Nigeria. The primary role of Social Studies historically has been to develop reflective citizens in a democratic society, because of this important responsibility, Social Studies teachers should be adequately prepared to be able to teach the students about Human Rights that is a key component of 21st century civic education.

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